

Statement of Karen Laski, Board of Directors CT Votes for Animals, in Support (with an amendment) of HB 5293 before the Environment Committee, March 14, 2022.

Co-chairs, Senator Cohen and Representative Gresko, Honorable members of Environment Committee, my name is Karen Laski and I live in Manchester CT. I am a member of the Board of Directors representing CT Votes for Animals, an organization with almost 6000 supporters across Connecticut; CVA strongly supports passage of HB 5293 with a change to remove “includes any animal that is not domesticated” in line 33.

I have been documenting animals in traveling shows for 28 years and working on legislation similar to 5293 since 2005. What follows are my experiences and observations from filming these traveling acts. The inherent brutality of circuses is the deprivation of natural behaviors the animals experience every day of their lives. What I have witnessed behind the scenes is horrendous. There is no question that animal acts are a cruel and unnecessary business. Elephants for example, can't even take an essential mud bath as they are hosed down to look pretty and any dust is blown off of them. Wild animals need to walk and run which they need for proper digestion, exercise and psychological well-being. Being shackled and caged causes animals to develop neurotic behaviors like pacing, head bobbing, self-mutilation, depression and aggression that can end up dangerous for the humans that surround them. There have been many incidents of wild animals injuring trainers or spectators because they were scared or traumatized. Animals can't be animals and their lives are forever bleak.

You can't train a wild animal with positive reinforcement so they are beaten until they are broken. This intimidation continues as long as the animals are used, often for many decades. In CT, I witnessed a baby elephant being traumatized so she wouldn't defecate in the ring during the show. While hiding under a truck I saw several circus workers surround the baby and stomp their feet while yelling till she defecated right there. Another time a circus worker was loading llamas on to a trailer. One llama was appeared to be frightened and would not go up the ramp. The man used something in his hand, and stuck it into the llama's vagina. She bolted forward.

The last circus to come to CT before Covid was Garden Brothers in Danbury CT. Danbury Ice Palace has agreed not to host any more circuses that use animals because of the protests, public outcry and what they witnessed themselves. My short film footage of Betty, an elephant used that day is here. <https://youtu.be/R41pSlAegIM> Also a link here is for a short compilation of videos I've filmed and narrated which makes it easy to see what animals experience in traveling animals shows in CT.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JymEZe3LdBE> Wild animals in traveling shows suffer endlessly emotionally and physically and many times die a miserable death from an untreated, long standing ailment.

What do children learn through these displays of insensitivity? What are they thinking when they are at a fair in Guilford watching bears riding horses. They learn that bullying an innocent animal is entertainment and legal in CT.

People have become more aware of the callous treatment of animals in traveling acts and parents now understand how children learn a

warped view of nature by watching wild animals performing silly tricks. Many schools, churches, charities and businesses in CT have agreed not to host animal acts. In CT, Bristol Commons, Goodyear Tire, the Red Cross, Western CT State University, Manchester school district and Manchester Community Technical College have said no to animal acts as well. Three years ago the Yard Goats cancelled an act of monkeys riding dogs because of the public outcry. We are hopeful that this committee will follow suit after you watch the film footage and listen to all the testimony on behalf of the animals by people who have no other agenda other than to see that these animals who have suffered for so long are enabled to live out their lives in peace at sanctuaries that are awaiting them.

The animal entertainment industry in CT has been dwindling as more people understand its inherent cruelty. HB 5293 reflects the moral judgement of the majority of the State's residents. CVA supports the bill as written with one modification to remove "includes any animal that is not domesticated." We have reason to believe some exhibitors will use that language as a loophole to exclude from the bill's scope wild animals bred, born or raised in captivity.

CVA and I personally want to thank the Committee for raising this bill. It is a long time coming.

Thank you.

Karen Laski